

Good afternoon.

It is an honor to be joining the College of Visual Arts' graduating class of 2010 for your commencement ceremony. This is truly a happy occasion.

Let me start by extending my congratulations to the graduates. You are completing an academic journey and beginning an exciting future of new challenges and opportunities. Today is a milestone in your life - not the first or the last milestone - but a significant achievement that deserves to be celebrated.

Thank you for allowing me to share this special day with you.

To CVA President Ann Ledy - thank you for the invitation to be here today and for your leadership of this academic treasure we have here in St. Paul. To the CVA faculty and Board of Trustees - your contribution to student success deserves to be recognized and appreciated.

Not one of today's graduates started their journey alone and neither will they graduate alone. So I would like to recognize and warmly greet the family members and the friends of today's graduates. Your support continues to be important.

Graduates, you are all entering an exciting new world. Your education and training in art and design has prepared you not only for a job, but to engage and explore the world. You have decisions to make: How do you make a living? Where are you going to live? Do you pursue your passion? Or, do you put dreams on hold to pay the bills?

What ever personal and professional decisions you make - you need to know that pursuing a career and making a living making art is a viable, realistic, and valuable option. And I want you to be successful.

I am not an artist. If I tried to be an artist I would be a very, very hungry artist. I truly admire the energy and spirit of men and women who are driven to create and have the courage to make a living making art. But artists and designers can't do it alone - you need housing, transportation, health care, studio space, and, of course, people to pay you for your work. You need to use your voices to advocate for your interests.

In my job as a Member of Congress I do have the opportunity - and I feel a responsibility - to help provide opportunities for artists and arts organizations and patrons of the arts. I get to do this through my support for funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities which provides grants here in Minnesota. There is arts education funding for our public schools that needs support, along with increases in Pell Grants and student aid for higher education students. Of course, working to make sure all Americans - artists included - have access to affordable, quality health care is important too.

In all these ways and more government can play a positive role in establishing a supportive environment in which creativity can flourish.

Strong, thriving, successful communities need creative people - smart, innovative, creative people. What the author Richard Florida calls the "Creative Class." That's you.

The Twin Cities are a great place to live because the Creative Class is alive and thriving. We have an abundance of colleges and universities, cutting edge industries, and great artistic and cultural amenities. Artists along with engineers, lawyers, doctors, and architects are examples of the essential creative mix that makes our community economically vibrant and a place that attracts talent in a wide variety of fields.

It is an honor for me to represent St. Paul and the surrounding communities in Congress. I tell people that I work in Washington but I live in St. Paul. My congressional office is below Nina's and my home is just two blocks from the CVA gallery. So we are neighbors. And, I love having CVA students as neighbors.

One of my favorite benefits of being a neighbor is the CVA Holiday Art Sale which has been and will again be a great source of Christmas gifts - thank you all very much. As a neighbor and an elected official I want our community to be strong, vibrant, and filled with energy. We all want this. We all want security, economic vitality, and a sense of belonging. I raise this because this is how I feel about CVA's presence - your presence - in the neighborhood. I live here in part because of the energy that flows from people who are civically and creatively engaged.

A good friend of mine - George Sutton - also lives in our neighborhood. George is a former actor, he has managed arts organizations, and he now works with arts organizations and artists all over the U.S. to help make them economically successful. George sees artists as determined, committed people in the business of making art - regardless of its form. The goal - like any small business person or entrepreneur - is to bundle together passion, talent and great

ideas into something that generates income - a livelihood. These are the people my friend George calls the "artpreneurs" or artists who are committed to making a living by making art.

And, just like business entrepreneurs, "artpreneurs" are the risk takers, they are on the cutting edge, and they are a creative engine that adds value and vitality to community. The idea of building community is something artists understand - and are successful at.

St. Paul's Lowertown neighborhood has been transformed over the past thirty years due in large part because artists and city planners worked together to rehabilitate abandoned warehouses into artist live-work space - a model of urban regeneration. Other businesses located in Lowertown as a result. This once marginalized area is now a thriving neighborhood built on a foundation of artprenurial energy.

As an elected official I want a thriving arts community in Minnesota. Whether it's Lowertown in St. Paul or Northeast Minneapolis, we have examples in the Twin Cities where artists have transformed neighborhoods resulting in new investment, more jobs, and greater economic opportunity.

Recently a group called Americans for the Arts released a report highlighting that nearly 3 million Americans are employed in an arts related jobs. In my own congressional district there are 1,500 arts related business and nearly 8,400 arts related jobs. These are jobs in creative industries, non-profits, as well as individual "artpreneurs." These are people who work hard, pay taxes, and contribute to a creative community that is at the heart of our Twin Cities economy and our special quality of life.

In Washington there are powerful interest groups trying to influence policy makers. But here at home there are also powerful voices - my constituents. And, they are not shy about sharing their opinions with me ... especially when I am shopping at Mississippi Market or Target.

As an elected official it is these personal encounters - the phone calls, the letters, or lobbying by constituents at the grocery store that really does help me understand peoples' views on important issues or an emerging issue.

In our democracy your voice - the voice of the citizen - can make a difference. And when all your voices are organized - people who make a living in the arts, people who are patrons of the arts, parents who care about arts education, and organizations working to increase federal funding for the arts - it makes a difference.

Did you know my colleagues and I in the U.S. House worked to get \$50 million included in the Recovery Act for grants to arts organizations? We did it over the strong objections of Democrats and Republicans in the Senate who thought spending on the arts had nothing to do with stimulating the economy.

Let me tell you something you already know, in a tough economy artists have to eat too. And arts jobs that are saved or created are just as important as any other jobs. We needed to save jobs in the arts and we did. But, that funding didn't just happen. It was included because arts organizations and arts advocates made their voices heard and Congress responded. Just as small businesses lobby local, state, and federal officials on issues important to them, entrepreneurs need to be organized, focused and vocal in expressing their needs.

As CVA graduates - I want to hear your voices and opinions - about the arts, about the economy, health care, the environment - about any issue that is important to you. Your voice needs to be heard individually and collectively in the public debate about the role of government in your future and the future of our community. Your voice will help me and other elected officials do our jobs better. Let me conclude by again congratulating all the graduates. You should be proud of this accomplishment. Since art is your career go out and make art. Find a way to make a living doing what fills you with joy and passion - even though it may be difficult and success may not happen over night. And along the way, if you see me in Kowalskis or Nina's don't hesitate to tell me what you are doing and how your member of Congress can make a difference in the life of an entrepreneur.

Thank you and good luck!

